

February 20, 2001

REPORT FROM CITY HALL

by Ed Corrigan Councillor, Ward 7

As a newly elected City Councillor I am honoured to bring an update on City Hall business. On February 20, 2001, Council approved the City Budget for 2001. The new budget represents an increase of 2.5 % in the property tax rate. City Council last year adopted a separate Sewer Improvement Tax. This sewer money is allocated to fund the \$500 million dollar budget needed to maintain, upgrade and replace London Sewers over the next 20 years. This includes \$65 million to build the Southside Pollution Control Plant to service residential and industrial growth in south-west London over the next 50 years.

This budget contains the first property tax rate increase in three years. For the average tax payer this represents about a \$55.00 tax increase in their yearly tax bill. With down loading of services from the Province to municipalities and the tremendous rise in energy costs and the fact that many operating costs are set by the provincial government (including social assistance) I believe that this is a fair and fiscally responsible budget. Even the Chamber of Commerce supported a tax increase recognizing that investment was needed. To reduce the rate would have meant a reduction in services which would hurt many in our community and delay needed investment in our City's infrastructure.

Budget highlights include \$1,000,000 in capital expense to be added to the \$1,000,000 in the 2000 Budget to build a "no frills" replacement Springbank footbridge. The old bridge required costly repairs and was in danger of falling. Also included in the budget is a much needed refurbishing of Storybook Gardens, including building skating lanes to increase winter usage of the park. There was no provision for building a much needed arena in the Byron-Westmount area. This project will be worked on in the future.

Other issues of interest to Byron area residents include the February 1, 2001 Ontario Municipal Board (OMB) decision to partially allow the developer's appeal of Council's decision to not allow the building of two 12 storey apartment buildings, containing 322 units, on Reservoir Hill. The OMB ruling allowed one apartment building with 12 stories and 165 units. The OMB also ruled that the developer donate 2 acres to the City as parkland. Council has appealed the decision. The City has expressed an interest in purchasing the property but not at any price as the taxpayer's interest must be protected.

Tim Horton's Donuts has also appealed to the OMB the decision of City Council to reject a proposal to build a drive-through donut shop at 1314 and 1322 Commissioners Road West. On December 18, 2001, led by your two Ward 7 Councillors, Council voted 11-8 to reject the zoning change. The concern was primarily about traffic volume and safety. This vote overruled City planning staff who supported the application. Council reaffirmed this rejection on February 5, 2001. As Councillor for the Ward I requested that an independent planning consultant be hired to represent the Council's position in this matter.

If you have any questions, or concerns, relating to Ward 7, or City business, please feel free to contact my Co-Councillor Susan Eagle at (o) 661-4876 or (r) 657-8720; or myself at (o) 661-1558 or (r) 652-0973. We are here to represent your interests at City Hall.

(554 words)